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THE GULL



GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

VOL. 89 NO. 5

MAY 2004

FOUNDED 1917

Family Day Celebrates Return of the Terns

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On March 28, shortly after noon, Corrina Gould, a Muwekma Ohlone, handed a small bundle of fragrant, smoking sage to the adults and children gathered in a circle at the Alameda Wildlife Refuge for Family Day. After the sage was passed to each person in turn, she blessed the imminent arrival of the California Least Terns to their nesting ground at Alameda Point and gave thanks for all nature's gifts.

As part of the Family Day opening ceremony, Mary Rudge of Alameda and A.M. Fonda of Emeryville each read one of their poems. Leora Feeney, Chair of Golden Gate Audubon's Friends of the Alameda Wildlife Refuge (FAWR) committee, the event's sponsor, gave a brief history of the nesting tern colony and refuge, beginning in the 1970s. At that time, the site was still part of the Alameda Naval Air Station, and the commander's wife, concerned about the welfare of the terns, asked that the U.S. Navy take measures to safeguard the colony. After the air station closed in the mid-1990s, Golden Gate Audubon formed FAWR, which has been working to have 565 acres transferred to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) and designated as a permanent national wildlife refuge (see February *Gull*).

Family Day 2004, the second such event Golden Gate Audubon has hosted, presented a unique opportunity to visit the proposed national wildlife refuge, which is not yet open to the public. During the afternoon, adults and children eagerly piled into a van for tours of the refuge. FAWR volunteers led visitors to view one of the refuge wetlands, where dowitchers, American Avocets, and Black-necked Stilts were foraging, and to observe nesting Great Blue Herons, Killdeer, and Canada Geese. Family Day participants were also able to reenact the California Least Terns' perilous



Allen Waters leads Family Day participants in Native American games.

Charles Denson

FAMILY DAY, continued on page 12

Alameda Refuge Threatened

Shortly after Family Day at the Alameda Wildlife Refuge, Golden Gate Audubon received distressing news that the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) may be preparing to abandon plans to assume ownership of the refuge.

Beginning in 1994, Golden Gate Audubon worked hard and successfully with the USFWS to request that a portion of the Alameda Naval Air Station be set aside to preserve the nesting ground of the endangered California Least Tern. For 10 years, formal transfer of the land from the U.S. Navy to USFWS has been delayed as the two entities struggled over cleanup of toxic contaminants on the site.

At the same time, however, the Least Tern population has flourished. The refuge also provides essential habitat for the endangered California Brown Pelican and a hundred other wildlife species. Golden Gate Audubon's Friends of the Alameda Wildlife Refuge (FAWR) committee and its education program have brought hundreds of schoolchildren to the refuge on field trips and have opened it to the public on Family Day, demonstrating how valuable the site is for both local wildlife and the residents of the Bay Area.

How You Can Help

Please write Gale A. Norton, Secretary of the Department of the Interior, and ask that she withdraw the directive to abandon the ref-

REFUGE THREATENED, continued on page 12

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The Golden Gate Audubon Society was founded January 15, 1917, and became a chapter of National Audubon in 1948. Golden Gate Audubon Society membership is \$20 per year. Renewals should be sent to the Golden Gate Audubon office. Monthly meeting: second Friday in the West Bay; third Thursday in the East Bay, 7 p.m.

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Help Pass Clean Water and Wetlands Bill



Golden Gate Audubon and Audubon California, along with many Audubon chapters, are sponsoring a major bill to fill a huge loophole in the federal Clean Water Act. Senate Bill 1477, authored by Senator Byron Sher (D-Palo Alto), will require the California Water Resources Control Board to protect the state's seasonal waterways and wetlands from development and pollution. Passage of this bill is among the highest legislative priorities this year for environmental groups.

The loophole was created when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued a "guidance" to its field offices that removed millions of acres of wetlands and thousands of miles of streams from federal protection. After overwhelming public opposition, the Bush Administration dropped a proposal to exempt these waters, but left the EPA guidance in place (see February 2004 *Gull*). Other states have also introduced legislation to fill the gap.

For the Bay Area, SB 1477 is a tremendously important bill. San Francisco Bay's seasonal wetlands support more than a million shorebirds and hundreds of thousands of waterfowl. The streams found in the East Bay hills are often intermittent, flowing only during the rainy season. Nevertheless, they are invaluable to wildlife and, along with wetlands, play a critical role in keeping the bay clean. Many Sierra Nevada streams and lakes are also seasonal waters.

Failing to close this dangerous loophole also threatens public health and the state's economy. More than half of California residents depend on seasonal waters for potable drinking water. Birding, fishing, and other recreational activities associated with seasonal waters add \$2.6 billion annually to the state's economy. Even the President's Office of Management and Budget recently found that pollution control laws save far more in public health dollars than they cost to implement.

How You Can Help

Write both your state senator and your assembly member by June 1 and urge them to support SB 1477. You can find your state legislators at www.vote-smart.org. For their contact information, go to www.senate.ca.gov or to www.assembly.ca.gov and click on "legislators." Background materials on the bill and sample support letters can be found at www.audubon-ca.org. You can also contact Arthur Feinstein at Golden Gate Audubon at 510.843.6551 or afeinstein@goldengateaudubon.org.

by Julia Levin, State Policy Director, Audubon California

Preserving Contra Costa Open Spaces

Golden Gate Audubon urges Contra Costa property owners to vote in favor of the upcoming Open Space Measure, which offers an unprecedented opportunity to protect wildlife and enhance recreation. The measure will be decided by a ballot mailed to property owners on June 10. If the measure is approved, approximately \$8 million will be earmarked annually to protect open spaces and wildlife habitat, and to preserve land adjacent to rivers, streams, and San Francisco Bay. Other benefits include maintaining and improving parks and trails. The measure guarantees that all funds raised will be invested within Contra Costa County.

How You Can Help

Contra Costa property owners should watch for their ballots and vote in favor of the measure, which is supported by a broad coalition of elected officials, businesses, and environmental organizations. For more information, visit www.contracostaopenspace.org or contact Ivy Morrison, Community Outreach Coordinator, Coalition for Open Space, 1196 Boulevard Way, Suite 10, Walnut Creek, CA 94595, or call 925.381.4187.

Surveying Nesting Cooper's Hawks in the East Bay

In the summer of 2001, when I was a new Berkeley resident, my only exercise was taking my two-year-old to Codornices Park. As the Director of the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory (GGRO), I occasionally ran into Ralph Pericoli, a longtime GGRO volunteer who was monitoring local hawk nests. What started with casual raptor-nesting gossip soon evolved into planning a new volunteer effort: a Cooper's Hawk nest survey in the East Bay.

Ralph and I decided that we would try to find every Cooper's territory in Berkeley and Albany, a squarish study area totaling roughly 3.6 by 2.9 miles. We would learn the spacing of nests and the numbers of hawks fledged, then would compare annual results to the GGRO hawk count at the Marin Headlands.

Why Cooper's Hawks? Although they are one of the big three migrants at the Golden Gate, surprisingly little is known of their nesting habits in California. Also, they are smaller than local buteos and therefore would have smaller and more numerous territories.

In February 2002, Ralph and I invited curious GGRO volunteers to the launch meeting of CHINS, the Cooper's Hawk Intensive Nesting Survey. We divided the East Bay study area into 19 smaller search areas and gave the 25 volunteers extensive

training. Displays, nest building, copulation, incubation, brooding, branching, dispersal, how not to disturb the hawks—we covered it all.

After two years, we have learned much about Cooper's Hawk nesting habits. Here are some highlights from more than a thousand volunteer hours: We located 12 nests in 2002 and again in 2003. In 2002, all 12 nests fledged at least one young; in 2003, only nine nests were successful. The earliest nest building was February 21; the earliest egg, March 30; the earliest chick in

Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Ralph spent many hours matching feathers and bones of the hundreds of prey items picked up each year. In 2002, nearly two-thirds of the prey were Mourning Dove, American Robin, and Rock Pigeon, although other birds and some mammals were evident.

Credit for the success of this study goes to our dedicated CHINS Coordinator, Ralph Pericoli, and also to all the CHINS volunteers. Thanks also go to the staff of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology and the East Bay Municipal Utility District, to members of Golden Gate Audubon and the East Bay Birder Listserv, and to East Bay Birder Czar Larry Tunstall, for access, sightings, and encouragement.

How You Can Help

Our goal is to keep CHINS going for as long as possible so we can gain a thorough understanding of the forces that work for and against urban Cooper's Hawks. If you have an interesting Coop sighting or know about a local nest, contact Allen Fish of the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory at 415.331.0730 or afish@parksconservancy.org. You can also request a copy of the 2003 CHINS report, which has more detail about the survey results.

by Allen Fish,
Director, Golden Gate Raptor Observatory



Tony Brake

Juvenile Cooper's Hawks in a Berkeley park.

the nest, May 8. The earliest flights were mid-June. By the end of July, most hawks had dispersed. The most common nest trees were American Elm, Coast Live Oak, and Monterey Pine. Nest heights ranged from 30 to 100 feet.

Thanks to Dr. Carla Cicero of U.C.

Donations

Thank you for your generous donations to support our many conservation, education and member activities!

Golden Eagle (\$1000 or more)

Anonymous (MLK Education incl Pen Pal Project), Anonymous (Latin America Comm. Grupo Ecologico Sierra Gorda Project), Anonymous*, Richard Bacheneimer

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In-Kind

Judy Irving*: Documentary Film on SF Quail Population
Ron Barklow & Viola Saima-Barklow:
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FIELD TRIPS

Susan Groves



San Bruno Mountain

San Mateo County

Saturday, May 1

Leaders: Herb Brandt, 415.239.2711 and Doug Allshouse

Meet at 9 a.m. at headquarters parking lot on Guadalupe Canyon Parkway for a half-day trip, a joint activity with Friends of San Bruno Mountain. See migrating birds and returning breeders such as Bullock's Orioles, Western Tanagers, flycatchers, and Wrentits. Winter Wren is particularly abundant.

[\$]

Tilden Regional Park

Alameda County

Sunday, May 2

Leader: Lewis Cooper
510.526.1773, lbcpr@earthlink.net

Meet at 9 a.m. at the Nature Center parking lot for a half-day trip birding Jewel Lake and other areas. Orange-crowned Warblers and House Wrens should be vocal, and Black-headed Grosbeaks should be present. We hope to see migrating hummingbirds. Beginners welcome. Heavy rain cancels. Enter park from Canyon Dr., where Spruce meets Wildcat Canyon Rd., or from Shasta Rd., off Grizzly Peak Blvd., in Berkeley. Follow signs to Nature Center at north end of park.



Mitchell Canyon

Contra Costa County

Sunday, May 2

Leaders: Pamela Llewellyn, 925.413.8329, pllewellyn@kleinfelder.com and Michael Butler, 510.526.2898, mjbkl@earthlink.net

Meet at 8:30 a.m. Trip lasts until midday. We will see and hear a variety of warblers, vireos, and flycatchers, and perhaps Lazuli Bunting. Bring fluids, sunscreen, and good walking shoes.

Take Hwy. 24 through Caldecott Tunnel to Walnut

Creek. Exit at Ygnacio Valley Rd. Go about 8 miles, then turn right onto Clayton Rd. After 1 mile, turn right onto Mitchell Canyon Rd. and continue into parking lot for park.



Strybing Arboretum

San Francisco

Sunday, May 2

GGAS co-leaders: Allan Ridley, Rick Ferrick; Strybing Arboretum Docents: Linda Lyons, Helen McKenna, 415.566.3241

Meet at 8 a.m. at front gate of Arboretum for this regular first Sunday of the month half-day trip. See *January Gull* for details. Beginners and all others welcome.

Black Diamond Mines Backpack and Birding Trip

Contra Costa County

Friday–Sunday, May 7–9

Leaders: Kathy and Blair Jarrett, 510.547.1233 (no calls after 9 pm), kathy_jarrett@yahoo.com

For schedule, equipment recommendations, fees, and directions, see *April Gull*.
[\$]

Wildcat Canyon Regional Park

Alameda County

Saturday, May 8

Leader: Malcolm Sproul, 925.376.8945

Meet at 8 a.m. by Arlington Clubhouse on Arlington Ave. in El Cerrito (next to tennis courts between Brewster Dr. and Thors Bay Rd.). From there we will drive a short

distance to trailhead on Rifle Range Rd. The 6-mile hike, with some hills, will cover a transect of the canyon: brushlands, oak woodlands, riparian areas, and grasslands. We anticipate seeing late migrants such as Western Tanagers and nesting birds such as Grasshopper Sparrows and Lazuli Buntings. We will also identify common trees. Allergy sufferers: we will encounter grassy conditions. Bring lunch and liquids. Malcolm will lead for the 25th year! Trip ends about 2 p.m.

Garin Regional Park

Alameda County

Sunday, May 9

Leader: Anne Hoff
510.845.5908, Anne2210B@cs.com

Meet at 8 a.m. to bird delightful riparian corridor where Yellow Warblers, Wilson's Warblers, Pacific-slope Flycatchers, Western Bluebirds, and Bullock's and Hooded Orioles may be seen and heard at close range. There is also a typical grassy hillside attractive to raptors, and a small pond sure to have coots and other swimmers. Trip ends when the competition becomes too great. Bring water. Take 580 to Foothill Blvd./Rt. 238 exit in Hayward. Continue straight on Foothill Blvd. In about 1.5 miles, veer left onto Mission Blvd./238. In about 2.5 miles, soon after Industrial Pkwy. meets Mission, turn left onto Garin Ave. Follow street uphill to Garin parking lots. Meet in parking area farthest to left. Alternatively, take 880, exit at Industrial Blvd. from north or south, turn right at T intersection with Mission, and turn left on Garin.

Monterey Seabirds Pelagic Trips

Monterey County

Sundays, May 9, June 13, July 11


All-day trips, 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., are offered by Monterey Seabirds with a \$10 discount for Golden Gate Audubon members. For information, see www.montereyseabirds.com.



Contact Susan Groves, Field Trips Committee Chair, at 510.654.5954 or susangroves@att.net:

- if you can share a ride or if you need a ride,
- if you have difficulty reaching a leader and need information,
- if you have suggestions for trips, or
- if you are interested in leading a trip.

key

 **Carpool**

[\$] **Entrance fee required**

 **Biking trip**

Iron Horse Trail Bicycle Birding Trip

Contra Costa County

Saturday, May 22

Leader: Kathy Jarrett, 510.547.1233

(no calls after 9 pm), kathy_jarrett@yahoo.com

Meet at Dublin/Pleasanton BART Station at 8:35 a.m., outside turnstile. Trip ends at Pleasant Hill BART at 3 p.m. A flat 20-mile excursion, mostly on paved bicycle paths. We'll bird the ponds at Heather Farms Park in Walnut Creek and go to Hap Magee Ranch Park in Alamo for lunch. Possible birds: Nuttall's Woodpecker, Green Heron, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Lesser Goldfinch, White-throated Swift, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Merganser and American Kestrel. May be cool early and warm later. Bring sunscreen, lunch, and liquids. In Danville you may buy food and drinks at farmer's market. Helmet required. Reservations not required but preferred. Call/email for leader's cell phone number. All levels of birders welcome. Rain cancels. Leader departs Rockridge BART 7:30 a.m., transferring to Fremont line at MacArthur BART at 7:34 and Dublin/Pleasanton line at Bayfair BART at 8:15. View BART schedules online at www.transitinfo.org. Remember to check Saturday schedules.



Spenceville Wildlife Area

Yuba/Nevada County

Sunday, May 23

Leader: Bob Lewis

510.845.5001, Rlewis0727@aol.com

Meet at 8 a.m. at Hammond Grove Park, south side of Hwy. 20, between Marysville and Smartville (very near a turnoff to the north to Brown's Valley and just east of a bridge over Dry Creek). We will bird this area briefly, looking for Common Merganser, Wild Turkey, and riparian birds, then caravan to Spenceville. This delightful area of oak foothills and small streams promises great looks at Lewis's Woodpecker, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, and a variety of woodland species. Driving time from Bay Area is about 2 hours. Bring lunch and plan to be out most of day. Some moderate walking along dirt roads and trails. Heavy rain cancels.

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Leona Heights Regional Open Space

Oakland

Sunday, May 30

Leader: Rusty Scalf

510.666.9936, rscalf@jps.net

Meet at 8 a.m. in parking lot for this half-day walk featuring riparian and scrub habitat, singing Wrentits, California Thrashers, and more. Beginners welcome. No facilities.

From Berkeley take 580 south to the Keller off-ramp (about 1.5 miles past junction with Hwy. 13). Go east (uphill) on Keller about .8 mile to Campus Dr. Turn left onto Campus, then right onto Canyon Oaks Dr. (this turn seems like entering into a private parking lot for Ridgemont condominiums). Go left to end of parking lot.

Aquatic Park

San Francisco

Sunday, May 30

Leader: SF Maritime National Historical
Park Ranger Carol Kiser

415.561.7100 or 561.7104

Meet at 9:30 a.m. at foot of Hyde Street Pier (Hyde and Jefferson) for a two-hour beginners' walk to discover birds next door to the urban environment. Dress in layers. Trip is wheelchair accessible.

Yosemite's Bird Life

Yosemite National Park

Friday–Sunday, June 4–June 6

Leaders: Dave Quady, 510.704.9353,

DaveQuady@worldnet.att.net and

Bob Lewis

See *March Gull* for details on this three-day trip. Make your reservations early!



Lassen Volcanic National Park

Shasta/Lassen Counties

Friday–Sunday, June 25–27

Leaders: Dan and Joan Murphy

murphsf@comcast.net (email preferred),

415.564.0074

Join the Murphy family on the annual camping excursion to Lassen. In past years, we have seen Willow, Hammond's and Dusky Flycatchers, Black Swift, Bald

Eagle, Osprey, Townsend's Solitaire, Mountain Bluebird, Calliope Hummingbird, Black-backed Woodpecker, Williamson's Sapsucker, and most of the warblers and finches that breed in the mountains.

On Friday and Sunday mornings, we meet at Manzanita Lake Campground store at 6:30 a.m. We will bird around the lake for 2–3 hours, return to camp for breakfast, then meet at the store at 10:30 a.m. for another outing. On Friday, we will take a 3-mile hike on a beautiful park trail. Wear sturdy shoes and bring lunch and liquids. Sunscreen, a hat, mosquito repellent, and warm clothing may be necessary.

Special Friday Night Preview: Join us at 7 p.m. to watch wildlife at the Hat Lake beaver pond. From Manzanita Lake, drive south into park for about 12 miles. Park in lot to left just beyond hairpin turn at Hat Lake. Bring mosquito repellent, a warm jacket, and a flashlight.

On Saturday, campers meet by the camp store at 7:30 a.m. and caravan north to Burney Falls, Fall River Valley, and Baum Lake. Those staying at Hat Creek Resort can meet us at 8 a.m. at the Vista Point about 12 miles north of the park on Hwys. 44 and 89. Bring lunch and liquids. This all-day excursion of about 100 miles will include a midday break of 2–3 hours for swimming at Lake Britton, hiking the trails, or watching one of California's most spectacular waterfalls.

On Sunday, after meeting at 10:30 a.m., we will drive through the park, making frequent stops for birding. We will head back after lunch at Summit Lake Campground.

Every evening, we will have a campfire beginning at 8 or 9 p.m. Stop by with your own chair and a cup. We will provide hot water. Check the campground bulletin boards or the office at Hat Creek Resort for our poster, campsite number, and any last-minute schedule changes.

Take I-5 north to Hwy. 44 in Redding. Go east on Hwy. 44 to northwest entrance of Lassen. Camping facilities are available at Manzanita Lake. Lodging is available about 15 miles north of park at Hat Creek Resort, Old Station, 530.335.7121. Other information can be obtained from the park website at www.nps.gov/lavo/index.htm.

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FIELD TRIPS, continued on page 9

BACKYARD BIRDER

Meg Pauletich



My love affair with Barn Owls began almost 25 years ago when I began training to become a docent with the Lindsay Wildlife Museum. I met John and Julie, a pair of lovely owls rescued by the museum and used to educate the public about their usefulness in our natural world. Since they were outwardly identical, it came as a surprise that John was the one that laid the eggs!

Barn Owls are utterly charming to look upon, although some people find them “creepy.” Their heart-shaped faces are also compared to monkey faces. Their coloring is lovely: white speckled breast and tawny feathers with an overlay of gray forming a pattern on back and wings. When seen flying at dusk or dawn, they might give out a dry scream, causing many to call them the “ghost owl.”

Owls belong to the order *Strigiformes*. This breaks into two families: the *Strigidae*, or typical owls, and the *Tytonidae*, or barn owls. All owls share many characteristics: strong bills that curve downward; forward-facing immovable eyeballs; nostrils with bristly feathers; ear openings that are asymmetrical; an outer toe that is reversible; and other similarities.

The Barn Owl's heart-shaped face forms a disc that probably helps it to hear better than any other bird. All owls use a combination of sight and sound to find their prey, but only Barn Owls need no light to see as they hunt. The left ear opening of the Barn Owl angles downward while the right side opening angles up. This makes the two ears more sensitive to sounds from different directions and enables the owl to triangulate the sound and zero in on its prey. Not only that, but the bird memorizes the sounds made by different prey and adjusts its speed, position, and orientation of each strike. The owl's specialized feathers make it virtually silent.

Since owls cannot rotate their eyeballs, they compensate by rotating their heads

nearly 180 degrees in each direction. No, they cannot turn their heads completely around. Owls also bob their heads up and down and from side to side to aid them in estimating distances. When captive Barn Owls do this head swinging with heads lowered, staring at you balefully, it is called “toe dusting.” They also favor an intruder with hisses and beak clicking while trying to make themselves appear larger, often lifting wings into a W. When an owl is in flight, the wings are amazingly long, up to three feet, six inches.

Barn Owls have quite long legs with feathers down to their long toes. The pectinate (comblike) middle claw is shared by all owls and probably aids in gripping prey. They are especially fond of rodents, but will take amphibians or reptiles and insects if hungry.

In the Central Valley of California, farmers have found that Barn Owls are their most effective pest control—and nontoxic too! There is a most interesting article in the March 2004 *Audubon* magazine on how the numbers of owls attracted to orchards and fields by nesting boxes have helped farmers tremendously. A pair of owls with up to 11 or more young will eat more than a dozen gophers a day!

Since owls do not have crops like most other birds, their means of ridding themselves of indigestible material (such as bones and fur) is to form a pellet that is regurgitated. The digestible materials are separated in the gizzard and passed along to an area where they are held for a number of hours before being regurgitated. It is thought that the stimulus to eject the casting may be hunger and the lack of room for another meal. It may also

clean out the upper digestive tract. If you find pellets below an owl's roost, an examination of them will divulge what it has been eating.

Barn Owls nest in nesting boxes when they cannot find a barn or other man-made structures or in a tree cavity or even caves or ledges. They can nest in any month of the year. When the feasting is good, they may have two broods of more than their average of 5 to 7 young. Eggs laid range from 2 to 11 in number. They hatch in sequence up to 14 days, so the parents have a busy time feeding all those mouths.

Barn Owl numbers are waning in areas where row crops such as corn and soybeans are grown. Also, as old buildings are destroyed or old trees felled, their nesting sites grow scarce. Where no chemicals are used for rodents, they thrive. Their real enemy is cars. Many injured are brought to rescue places such as the Lindsay.

Now all of us can be a part of an owl family. Since the discovery of a pair of Barn Owls in a nest box in Benicia, a camcorder was placed there and has been following the courtship, the egg laying (seven so far), and incubation. The first chick should



Barn Owl

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

hatch around March 26 and then the fun should really begin. Check them out at www.theowlcam.com.

I'm sure more fans of the Barn Owl will join the ranks of the rest of us aficionados who find them wonderfully charming.

PROGRAMS

Anne McTavish



Programs begin at 7:30 p.m. We meet socially at 7 p.m. For more information about upcoming events, detailed directions or updates, please see our web page.

www.goldengateaudubon.org/Chapter/programs2003-2004.htm

Sierra Birds: A Hiker's Guide

Berkeley

Friday, May 14

Jack Laws

Join local illustrator and naturalist Jack Laws for a demonstration and discussion of wildlife illustration. You may have seen Jack's work in the "Naturalist Notebook" in *Bay Nature* magazine. His new book, *Sierra Birds*, is a fully illustrated guide to the Sierra Nevada. He will discuss the process of creating the full-color illustrations for the guide and his experiences while painting, both in the field and in the studio.

Tongass National Forest

San Francisco

Thursday, May 20

Alaska is a bellwether state for environmental issues; it is the canary in the coal mine. The state of Alaska has been in the news consistently over the last three years as the focal point of the debate about oil drilling on public land—centered on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—as well as for



A Red Crossbill perches on a branch on Kodiak Island in Alaska.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

the Bush administration's attempt to undermine the Roadless Areas Conservation Rule—centered on the Tongass National Forest. Come see the glorious images of one of our nation's last great wilderness areas, the majestic Tongass National Forest in Alaska.

Course on East Bay Breeding Birds

Golden Gate Audubon will offer a two-week course to introduce beginning birders to some of our common East Bay breeding land birds. The class will emphasize field identification, building birding skills, and the pure joy of watching birds. It will also touch on birding ethics, reference materials, and natural history. Questions about optics and resources will be addressed individually. The classroom instructor will be Golden Gate Audubon member Lillian Fujii. Field trips will be co-led by Lillian and Steve Hayashi.

Classes will be held Wednesdays, May 12 and 19, 7:30 to 8:30 p.m., at the Golden Gate Audubon office, 2530 San Pablo Avenue, Suite G., Berkeley, CA 94702. Field trips will take place on Saturday mornings, May 15 and 22. The cost is \$20 for the public, \$18 for Golden Gate Audubon Supporting Members.

To register, send a check (payable to Golden Gate Audubon Society) to the address above. Please provide your phone number and e-mail address if the information is not on your check. If you have questions, call the office at 510.843.2222 or Lillian Fujii at 510.236.4167.

Garden Tour Features Audubon Member's Garden

The beautiful garden of Golden Gate Audubon board member Jacqui Smalley and John Austin, at 5920 Ross Street in Oakland's Rockridge district, will be open to the public on Saturday, May 15, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. as part of the Garden Conservancy's 2004 Open Days Program. Half of each \$5 admission fee will be donated to Golden Gate Audubon. No reservations are required to visit this and the other gardens. For more information, see the April 2004 *Gull* or visit www.gardenconservancy.org.

Birding in New York City

Golden Gate Audubon and Classic Escapes Nature and Cultural Journeys are planning a six-day trip to New York for May 2005. Anyone who has read Marie Winn's *Red-tails in Love, A Wildlife Drama in Central Park* knows that New York's Central Park is a wonderful place to see birds. We will also visit Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge and Prospect Park's Boathouse Audubon Center. The metropolitan area boasts a bird list of more than 400 species, including more than 175 breeding species. May, when 30 species of warbler have been recorded, is the best time to see spring migrants.

After morning bird walks, we will enjoy the city's cultural attractions. Our itinerary includes a guided tour of the city, a Broadway show, and tours of the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. We will stay at the Hotel Beacon (www.beaconhotel.com) on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

With local guides, travel via minicoach, and a splendid representation of eastern birds, this is the perfect trip for anyone visiting New York City. For more information, call Alan Hopkins at 415.664.0983.

OBSERVATIONS

March 1–31, 2004
Bruce Mast



March brought lots of clear, warm weather to the Bay Area, and the hotlines were full of first-of-season reports for flycatchers, kingbirds, vireos, swallows, tanagers, grosbeaks, and orioles. To this observer at least, it seemed that the unseasonably warm weather pushed our winter visitors out a little earlier than usual. Shorebirds and waders barely started taking on their fresh breeding plumage before they were off to cooler climes.

Loons to Ducks

Red-necked Grebes have been reported at various times this winter at Bodega Bay, SON, and offshore at Crissy Field, SF. The former bird was sighted again on March 7 (JM, RF) and the latter was reported on March 18 and 20 (mob). On March 11, a juvenile Snow Goose was with a flock of Canadas at Waldo's Pasture, near Inverness Park, MRN. The same individual was reported at Rush Cr Wetlands in Novato, a week earlier (RS). On March 20, a Ross's Goose was at a stock pond near at Huichica Cr, NAP (LK). Brants have begun their northern migration along the coast. Eurasian Wigeons were reported throughout the month in MRN, NAP, and SCL counties.

Duck watchers reported Blue-winged Teal from several locations in March. The most interesting report was from the Albany Shoreline, ALA, on March 11, where 3 Blue-Winged Teal were joined by a hybrid male Blue-Winged/Cinnamon Teal (RS). Throughout the month, multiple observers checked up on the Harlequin Duck at Coyote Pt, SM, where it will soon be celebrating its one-year anniversary in residence (mob). A Long-tailed Duck found a hospitable feeding pond birding at Huichica Cr, NAP, on March 20–24 (MB; LK; JL). As usual, Oakland's L Merritt, ALA, was a dependable locale for Tufted Duck and Barrow's Goldeneye but its most unusual guest this month was a hybrid Hooded Merganser/Goldeneye, reported on March 16 (RS).

Raptors to Alcids

On March 23, a light-morph Swainson's Hawk flew over the grasslands above Visitacion Valley Middle School, SF (JC). On March 12 and 13, a Merlin was observed attacking bats as they emerged from their roost in a downtown Palo Alto (SCL) building (KO, DSt). Two Ruffs continued throughout the month at the New Chicago Marsh in Alviso (mob).

A March 19 seawatch from Ocean Boulevard in Moss Beach, SM, recorded 2 Black-legged Kittiwakes making their way north (RST). An island in Charleston Slough, SCL, remained a preferred roost for up to 16 Black Skimmers through at least the 25th (BB, DVP). On Mar 29, a monitoring trip to the Cordell Bank produced a **Thick-billed Murre** (*Uria lomvia*), 11 miles WSW from Bodega head, the closest point of land. At the Bank, there were thousands of alcids, including good numbers of Ancient Murrelets (PP). Marbled Murrelets were sighted at various times off the SM, MRN, and SON Coasts.

Doves to Thrashers

On March 13, a Burrowing Owl stood guard near the entrance kiosk to Shoreline Park, SCL (MD). Burrowing Owls were also reported periodically at Arrowhead Marsh, ALA, at New Chicago Marsh, SCL, and at locations in eastern CC and SOL counties. Birders near Loma Prieta, in the Santa Cruz Mountains, watched an adult female Calliope Hummingbird fly across the county line into SCL on March 23 (RT, MBr). The same day, a male Rufous Hummingbird was seen foraging in the flowering Eucalyptus Trees at Coyote Pt, Museum, SM (RST).

A March 5 road trip through the San Antonio Valley, SCL, turned up Lewis's

Woodpeckers at 3 locations (BB), but Lewis's were absent from other locations around the region where they had over-wintered. On March 26, an immature female Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was seen at the edge of the grassy meadows near Coyote Pt Museum (RST). Yellow-billed Magpies are unusual in SF but 2 were found hanging out in the eucalyptus trees near Allemand Boatyard at the end of Fitch St on March 27 (BF). A lone Purple Martin buzzed a birder at the Bear Valley Visitor Center (PRNS, MRN) on March 28, suggesting PRNS will again host a nesting colony this year (BP). Visitors to the more arid eastern reaches of the Coast Range found Phainopeplas



Blue-Winged Teal

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

in early March. On the 3rd 2 birds were observed at Black Diamond Mines RP, CC (JM, RF). Two days later, a birder found 1 Phainopepla along Mines Rd, ALA, and a 2nd bird on the west side of Mt. Hamilton, SCL, just east of Smiths Cr (BB).

Wood Warblers to Finches

Warbler traffic remained light in March, with reports limited to an early Nashville, a couple Hermits, a Black-and-White, and a lingering Northern Waterthrush (see tables). Observers in search of orioles in GGP, SF, spotted a female Summer Tanager near Middle L on Mar 16 (ASH; AG). On March 19, 2 Grasshopper Sparrows returned early to their grassy hillside haunts near Higgins Purissima Rd in Half Moon Bay (RST).

Throngs of birders flocked to Arrowhead Marsh, ALA, on March 5 and 6 to see if the month's highest tides would flush the

elusive Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow. After sorting through flitting Yellowthroats, Savannah Sparrows, and a Song Sparrow, they were rewarded with clear views of a small pumpkin-faced sparrow (mob). Even more birders made the pilgrimage to Clifton Court Forebay, CC, in search of the season's 2nd **Snow Bunting** (*Plectrophenax nivalis*). Most birders who made the trip prior to the 18th were treated to a beautifully dumpy white bird with black and orange highlights foraging placidly on the gravel levee banks (mob).

Great-tailed Grackles are now regular fixtures at McNabney Marsh, CC, and continue to show up at the Coyote Cr Golf Club, SCL (MM), and at the Rooster Run Golf Course in Petaluma, SON (DN). On March 16, a Great-tailed Grackle welcomed visitors at the front entrance kiosk of L Cunningham Park in SJ, SCL (KBI). The hot topic on SF's email list in March was the proper identification of 4 Orioles in GGP, SF. The birds have overwintered near Middle L since at least Dec. 27. They were previously reported in this

Wood Warbler Sightings

Nashville Warbler			Black-and-white Warbler		
3/29	Coyote Pt Museum, SM	RT	3/26	SF Zoo, SF	DM
Hermit Warbler			Northern Waterthrush		
3/17-20	Stow L, SF	KrH	3/10	Charleston Rd Marsh, SM	BB
3/19	Presidio Hills, SF	JC			

Abbreviations for Observers: DA, David Armstrong; BB, Bill Bousman; DB, Dennis Braddy; KB, Ken Burton; KBI, Kim Blythe; MB, Murray Berner; MBr, Matt Brady; PB, Patricia Braddy; HC, Hugh Cotter; JC, Josiah Clark; LC, Les Chibana; ADM, Al DeMartini; GD, Gary Deghi; JD, Jim Danzenbaker; MD, Matthew Dodder; AE, Al Eisner; MWE, Mark Eaton; BF, Brian Fitch; MF, Mike Feighner; RF, Rich Fernick; RFi, RF; AG, Arlene Gemmill; SG, Steve Glover; ASH, Alan Hopkins; KH, Keith Hansen; KrH, Kristi Hein; LH, Lisa Hug; SH, Steve Huckabone; JK, Larry Kent; AJ, Alvaro Jaramillo; CL, Cindy Lieurance; CDL, Calvin Lou; DL, Don Lewis; JL, John Luther; LL, Les Lieurance; RL, Robin Leong; RLe, Rick Lebaudour; DM, Dan Murphy; JM, Joe Morlan; KMK, Kevin McKereghan; MM, Mike Mammoser; PM, Peter Metropulos; DN, Dan Nelson; KO, Kris Olson; BP, Bob Power; JP, John Poole; PP, Peter Pyle; BR, Bob Richmond; Bre, BRe; JR, Jean Richmond; MR, Mark Rauzon; MRo, Mike Rogers; DS, David Suddjian; DSi, Dan Singer; DSt, Dick Stovel; ES, Emilie Strauss; ESe, Emily Serkin; PS, Paul Saraceni; RS, Rich Stallcup; RSc, Rusty Scalf; RST, Ron Thorn; RT, Ryan Terrill; MU, Myra Ulvang; DVP, David Vander Pluym; FV, Frank Vanslager; AW, Alan Wight; AWi, Adam Winer; DW, Denise Wight; DWi, Dave Wimpfheimer; JY, James Yurchenco; MZ, Matt Zlatunich.

Semicolons separate original observer(s) from subsequent observer(s). Abbreviation "mob" = many observers, "oob" = other observers. Information is compiled from BirdBox transcripts and regional listservs, the author apologizes for any errors or omissions

Abbreviations for Counties and Others: ALA, Alameda; BBA, Breeding Bird Atlas; CBC, Christmas Bird Count; CC, Contra Costa; Cr, Creek; Cyn, Canyon; GGP, Golden Gate Park; L, Lake; MRN, Marin; MTY, Monterey; N., N; NAP, Napa; Pt, Point; PRNS, Pt Reyes National Seashore; ; RP, Regional Park; Rd, Road; Res, Reservoir; RS, Regional Shoreline; SB, State Beach; SCL, Santa Clara; SF, San Francisco; SM, San Mateo; SOL, Solano; SON, Sonoma; SP, State Park; SR, SR.

space and elsewhere as Hooded Orioles, but careful observation of these immature birds produced a number of field marks favoring Orchard, including relatively small size, behavior and call notes, the relatively short bibs, short bills, short tails, greenish-olive upperparts, bright yellow underparts,

squarish tails, and bold lower wingbars (BF; mob).

We end this month's column with a couple Red Crossbill sightings: on Mar 13, 6 turned up at East Fort Miley, SF (ASH), and the next day a flock was discovered at Skyline Memorial Cemetery, SM (RT).

FIELD TRIPS, continued from page 5

Yosemite Alpine Ecology
Saturday-Sunday, July 31-August 1

Leader: George Peyton
510.433.2609 (leave message)

This trip includes birding but will emphasize general alpine ecology. Although snow conditions prevent choosing a specific location far in advance, expect a full-day hike in the high country on Saturday and a shorter hike on Sunday, returning to our cars at about 3 p.m. All participants should be in good physical condition, with reasonable experience in hiking at elevations of 8,000 to 11,000 feet. Each day, bring lunch, ample fluids, hat, water-repellent jacket, sunscreen, and mosquito repellent, and wear good walking shoes or boots with treaded soles (we may traverse snowfields). Due to its popularity, this trip is by reservation only (call leader), and the numbers participating will be strictly limited. Make camping or lodging arrangements early.

County and forest service campgrounds are located

between Tioga Pass and Lee Vining off Hwy. 120 (4-6 miles west of Hwy. 395); Tuolumne Meadows Campground is in Yosemite National Park. Motels in Lee Vining: Best Western Lakeview Lodge 760.647.6543, Gateway Motel, 760.647.6767, and Murphy's Motel, 760.647.6316. [\$]

Tufted Puffins and Farallon Islands

Pelagic Trip

Sunday, August 8, 7:30 am

Leader: Alan Hopkins, 415.664.0983

We will depart at 7:30 a.m. from Sausalito aboard the *Salty Lady* for an eight-hour adventure to the Farallon Islands, offered by Golden Gate Audubon and Shearwater Journeys. The Farallons are home to nearly 200,000 nesting seabirds. We will observe Common Murre, Pigeon Guillemot, and Brandt's Cormorant. Tufted Puffins, difficult to find on some pelagic trips, are almost guaranteed. We will also watch for

California Sea Lions and Harbor Seals, and may spot Elephant Seals and Steller's Sea Lions. Weather permitting, we will head west to the edge of the Continental Shelf to search for deep-water seabirds. On previous trips, we have seen Black-footed Albatross, Northern Fulmar, Pink-footed Shearwater, Buller's Shearwater, Ashy Storm-Petrel, Sabine's Gull, and Rhinoceros Auklets, as well as Humpback Whale, Blue Whale, Gray Whale, Dall's Porpoise, Harbor Porpoise, Common Dolphin, and Northern Right-Whale Dolphin. Special price for GGAS members is \$94, nonrefundable. To register, send a check (noting that you are a member) to Shearwater Journeys, P.O. Box 190, Hollister, CA 95024. For each member in your party, include phone, e-mail address (if available), and a self addressed, stamped envelope. Note: Due to greatly fluctuating fuel prices, a \$5 to \$10 fuel surcharge may be necessary on the day of the trip. For information, call leader.

Environmental Exchange Between the Bay Area and the Mountains of Mexico

The letters on these pages were written as part of a joint program between Golden Gate Audubon's Martin Luther King, Jr. Environmental Education Program in Oakland and the Environmental Education Program of the Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda (GESG) in the state of Querétaro, Mexico. For three years, fourth- and fifth-graders in several East Oakland public schools have been exchanging letters with their counterparts in the Sierra Gorda and sharing experiences of their respective ecology classes, as well as their daily lives. The exchange program creates strong ties between the students and allows them to share their interest in the natural world and their desire to protect it.

The GESG recently received a substantial United Nations grant to further develop grassroots efforts to create sustainable agriculture projects for the community. The funds will also be used to educate adults and children about organic gardening, conservation, recycling, and ecotourism. The MLK Environmental Education Program continues to receive funding from various sources, enabling outreach to 10 Oakland public schools.



Sierra Gorda children and their families collect recyclables, one of the programs of the Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda.

Audre Newman

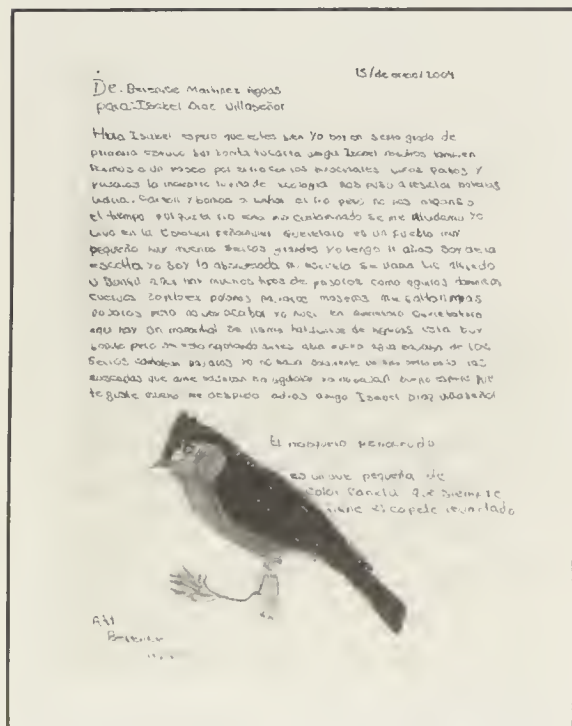
In March 2004, members of the Golden Gate Audubon Latin America Committee (LAC)—Audre and Roger Newman, Dana Gardner, Michael Chinn, and Howard Higgley—traveled to the Sierra Gorda. In addition to observing the local environment and bird life, they visited classrooms involved in the letter exchange project. They showed the students a video of an Oakland class field trip to Arrowhead Marsh (made by volunteer Mick Erausquin) and gave them letters from the Oakland students. The Sierra Gorda students were fascinated to see their pen pals and the Bay Area environment that they were studying. They were obviously delighted to receive the letters and were full of questions about their pen pals.

The LAC members met the GESG Director of Education, Marina Rendon Zorrilla, who serves the same role as Education Coordinator Amiko Mayeno does for the Golden Gate Audubon program, and went with two of the 13 *promotores* (environmental educators), to visit their classes. The Sierra Gorda and

Oakland programs have much in common. As in Oakland, *promotores* make monthly visits to classrooms to give ecology presentations and take the students on field trips. Both programs design their own educational materials, focusing on the local environment. For the GESG students, the species of concern is the Bearded Wood-Partridge; for Oakland students, it is the Clapper Rail. In addition, both programs actively promote the care and protection of the areas' natural resources.

The LAC members returned inspired. They brought back GESG teaching materials and plan to share the Oakland curriculum with the Sierra Gorda teachers. The Bay Area and the Sierra Gorda environments have in common a number of migratory bird species, further underscoring the connection between the two communities. Helping students in both areas understand how their actions affect these shared birds is just one step towards connecting them to each other and to the global environment we all share.

by Audre Newman with Susan Groves



Berenice Martinez Aguas in Querétaro, Mexico, wrote this letter to her Oakland pen pal.



Sierra Gorda fifth-graders talk with Audre Newman of the Golden Gate Audubon Latin America Committee, which visited the Sierra Gorda in March.

Dear Friend,

We went one day on a field trip with the ecology teachers and I liked it very much.

*I like to go on field trips because even though we recognize many types of birds, I would like to know more about them because they are very beautiful. Best of all are the *ava militaris* (military macaw). It has some beautiful colors and it is a splendid bird.*

Ismael Alvarado Gudino
Sierra Gorda

Dear Musio,

We went to a marsh to plant trees and to study the birds. We studied the water and measured how cold it was and what types of fishes could live there. We also collected trash so that it wouldn't go in the water. I learned a lot about the environment.

Affectionately,

Josue
Oakland



Mick Erasquin

A videotape viewed by Sierra Gorda students shows their Oakland pen pals testing the salinity of the water on an Arrowhead Marsh field trip.

Hi, Isabel,

We also went on a walk by the river with binoculars. We saw ducks and birds. The ecology teacher had us recycle bottles, glass, cardboard, and we are going to clean the river, but we didn't have enough time because the river is very polluted.

Here there are many types of birds, like eagles, dominicos, crows, turkey vultures, doves, and flycatchers.

Berenice Martinez Aguas
Sierra Gorda

To Mauro,

Each one of us has one type of bird, each of us is going to count our own bird. My bird is a brown pelican. The pelican eats fish.

Jaime
Oakland



Audre Newman

Sierra Gorda children help plant an organic garden.



Audre Newman

Sierra Gorda students receive letters from their Oakland pen pals.

2,000-mile migration from Guatemala to Alameda—the northernmost nesting location for this endangered species—following a half-mile mock-up of the migration route.

Although the return of the terns is still a month away, the nesting ground is now ready for their arrival. Earlier in March, 50 schoolchildren from West End Alameda came to the refuge on a Golden Gate Audubon field trip to help spread oyster shells on the nesting ground for the returning birds. The shells provide both camouflage from predators and protection from the wind.

Other Family Day activities, organized with the help of Rebecca Holder, included Native American games for children led by Allen Waters, a Lakota, storytelling by Corrina Gould, and a flute performance by Wally Johnson, a Potawatomi/Hochunk. The day concluded with a performance by the All Nations Singers and Medicine Warriors Dance Group, who also honored the California Least Tern and its importance to the San Francisco Bay Area.

The public will have another chance to visit the Alameda Wildlife Refuge on June 13 during an event titled Return of the Tern, sponsored by East Bay Regional Parks District, at Crab Cove Visitor Center in Alameda. Vans will take visitors from Crab Cove to see the terns on their nesting ground. Last year, 300 pairs of birds nested at the refuge. According to Rachel Hurt of USFWS, the colony has been increasing by roughly 10 percent each year. To accommodate the expanding population, USFWS and FAWR plan to enlarge the nesting area from six to nine-and-a-half acres.

How You Can Help

Friends of the Alameda Wildlife Refuge meets every third Monday, at 7 p.m., at Alameda Point and welcomes volunteers to participate in a number of refuge projects: conducting educational activities for elementary and high school students, joining work parties to maintain the habitat before and after nesting season, and monitoring wildlife populations. Contact Leora Feeney at 510.522.8525 or go to www.fawr.org.

REFUGE THREATENED, continued from page 1

uge. Remind her that few other National Wildlife Refuges are located within such easy reach of millions of residents, and that the refuge plays an important role in the recovery of two endangered species and the support of other wildlife. Address your letter to Secretary Gale A. Norton, Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20240.

Please send a copy of your letter to Senator Dianne Feinstein and Senator Barbara Boxer (U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510). Also send copies to Congressman Pete Stark (39300 Civic Center Drive #220, Fremont, CA 94538) and Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi (450 Golden Gate Avenue, 14th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94102), whose districts include the refuge land.

In the upcoming months, we will need your help to save the refuge. Please contact Golden Gate Audubon to get involved in this issue.

by Arthur Feinstein,
Conservation/Education Director

WELCOME
NEW
MEMBERS!

The GULL is the official newsletter of Golden Gate Audubon Society. As a supporting member of Golden Gate Audubon, you receive a subscription to *The GULL*, a 10 percent discount on all items purchased at our nature store, access to field trips and programs, and the opportunity to volunteer. Local members of the National Audubon Society automatically receive *The GULL*. Not a member yet? Contact our office at 510.843.2222 for details.

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